

**Statement of
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**Before the
House of Representatives
Committee on Appropriations
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Subcommittee**

Concerning

The US Forest Service Fiscal Year 2010 Budget

May 12, 2009

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Simpson, and members of the Subcommittee, it is a privilege to be here today to discuss the President's Budget request for the Forest Service in fiscal year (FY) 2010. I appreciate the significant support this committee has repeatedly demonstrated for the Forest Service. Working together, this committee and the Forest Service have served the public good by addressing issues from loss of open space to wildfire, from crime on national forestland to improving fish and other aquatic organism passage. With your continued support we will keep providing more of the things the American public expects and wants.

With the new administration, the Forest Service advances its mission to sustain the Nation's forests and grasslands through direct stewardship of the 193 million acres of the National Forest System, technical assistance to state and private partners, and science. The Forest Service continues to manage the National Forest System to provide diverse benefits to the public such as clean water, fish and wildlife habitat, recreation, and forest products. The Forest Service will make progress in its partnerships with other Federal agencies, States, local governments, tribes, and private landowners to sustain forests and address climate change and other issues across the landscape. The Forest Service will continue to develop innovative tools and provide understanding of complex forest ecosystems through its unique research program. And the Forest Service will continue to advance forest management across the globe in our International Programs.

The FY 2010 President's budget request for the Forest Service totals \$5.2 billion in discretionary appropriations, a 9 percent increase over the FY 2009 enacted level. As part of the budget, the President is proposing three major initiatives for the Forest Service in addition to maintaining essential funding levels for critical program areas.

Before discussing the FY 2010 budget further, I would like to thank this committee for your support of our mission by providing \$1.15 billion to the Forest Service through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA). The Forest Service is using these funds to create over 20,000 new private sector jobs and promote economic recovery, especially in those areas which the recession has impacted most. In addition to restoring jobs and revitalizing

economies, the Forest Service ARRA projects will restore the land and improve facilities and infrastructure, augmenting critical mission objectives for the agency.

Presidential Initiatives

The FY 2010 Budget for the Forest Service includes three Presidential initiatives: Responsibly budget for wildfire suppression; Conserve new lands; and Protect the national forests. This suite of initiatives addresses the challenges we face, including the three themes I identified before last year's budget hearings: climate change, water supply and quality, and loss of connection to nature, especially for youth.

Responsibly Budget for Wildfire

Fires in recent years have become larger and more difficult to control due to a variety of factors, including climate change; persistent drought and hazardous fuels conditions; and the increased magnitude and complexity of the Wildland Urban Interface. As these factors extend fire seasons and escalate cost, annual fire suppression expenditures have routinely exceeded the amount budgeted for suppression. Since 2002, the Forest Service has used the authority provided by Congress to transfer over \$2 billion from other programs to fire suppression to cover these costs. Even when the transferred funds are repaid through supplemental appropriations, these transfers result in significant disruptions in the agency's ability to deliver its program of work.

Our FY 2010 budget proposes a strategy to responsibly budget for wildfire that centers on three main tactics: fully fund the ten-year average suppression costs, establish a discretionary contingency reserve account, and ensure fire management resources are used in a cost-effective manner in high-priority areas. The budget provides additional fire management resources for fire suppression that reduce the likelihood or magnitude of transferring funds from other critical Forest Service activities should fire costs exceed the ten-year average for suppression costs.

The request to increase the fire suppression budget by \$135 million over FY 2009, to fully fund the ten-year average for suppression costs of \$1.1 billion, represents a significant shift in budgeting policy. In recent years, the Forest Service budget request reduced funding for non-fire programs to maintain funding for the ten-year average for suppression costs, to meet an overall budget cap. This approach was in place even as the ten-year average cost for suppression rose by nearly \$600 million between FY 2001 and FY 2008. The approach proposed in the 2010 budget preserves funding for the Forest Service's non-suppression programs despite rising fire costs.

In addition, the FY 2010 President's Budget proposes a discretionary wildland fire contingency reserve of \$282 million. The fund would be available to the Secretary, subject to a Presidential finding of need, once the suppression appropriation is exhausted and as long as suppression is fully funded at the ten-year average. The fund would enable the agency to respond to wildfires which threaten lives, property, and resources on more than 210 million acres of agency-protected lands, while minimizing the potential for the transfer of funds from other Forest Service programs to suppression, ensuring that resources for other critical Forest Service activities are available. The request for the Department of the Interior includes a similar \$75 million proposal.

Along with fully funding the 10-year average and the wildland fire contingent reserve fund, the Forest Service will continue to deploy analytic support tools to improve fire incident and program decision-making, cost containment, and agency accountability. A number of Wildland Fire Decision Support Systems, such as FSPro, which models fire behavior, and RAVAR, which models values at risk from fire, provide real-time support to fire managers implementing Risk-Informed Management.

The projects accomplished through ARRA will augment these budgetary efforts by restoring forests to a state in which they are less prone to catastrophic fire. The bill provides \$500 million for hazardous fuels reduction, forest health protection, rehabilitation, and ecosystem improvement. These funds will be evenly divided between federal and non-federal lands. Up to \$50 million of the \$500 million are available for Wood-to-Energy grants. These grants are being coordinated with hazardous fuels treatments to maximize biomass available for energy creation. We anticipate using these funds for hundreds of hazardous fuels reduction, forest health, and ecosystem restoration projects while creating jobs in economically distressed areas.

Conserve New Lands

While Americans can take great pride in our existing national forest system and other public lands, there are many landscapes and ecosystems at risk. Fifty-seven percent, or 430 million acres, of our Nation's forests are privately owned. Family forest owners and other landowners are facing increasing pressure to develop their land, which fragments ownership and converts environmentally important forests to non-forest use. Conservation across a landscape is essential to address large-scale conservation issues such as adaptation to climate change, conservation of water resources, reduction of wildfire risk, and protection of at-risk species.

The budget includes a \$34 million Presidential Initiative to conserve new lands through the Forest Legacy Program funded from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). Funded at \$91 million for FY 2010, the Forest Legacy program protects forested lands under significant development pressures through acquisition of conservation easements and fee-simple purchases. The easements acquired protect air and water quality, provide access to national forests, and provide habitat for threatened or endangered wildlife and fish. This budget proposes spending \$119 million of the LWCF through the Forest Service as part of broader effort to conserve land by increasing LWCF appropriations for the Departments of Agriculture and Interior to \$420 million.

Protect the National Forests

The national forests face significant challenges to both protect new investments and sustain older infrastructure. Ecologically sustainable investments in roads, trails, and facilities made through ARRA require resources to protect those new assets through maintenance. The National Forest System has a transportation system that is not suited to its modern needs and requires realignment to "right-size" the system for the future. A number of Forest Service facilities have urgent health and safety maintenance needs that, if not addressed, could result in those facilities' closure.

The FY 2010 President's Budget augments the work to be accomplished via the ARRA by including a \$50 million Presidential Initiative to protect the national forests by extending and enhancing those investments. This initiative demonstrates the Forest Service's commitment to maintaining a healthy environment by addressing critical maintenance and operational components of the Forest Service. These funds will be a cornerstone for sustaining a healthy environment, and will be focused on three priorities which will: protect the investments made through the ARRA; implement travel management plans with an emphasis on decommissioning unnecessary roads; and address urgent health and safety needs at facilities. These strategic investments will reduce the agency's overall maintenance and operational costs in future years, result in infrastructure that is more energy efficient, and reduce potential harm to the environment.

Focal Points for the Forest Service

Climate Change

Forests and grasslands produce many ecosystem services on which our nation relies: clean water, clean air, wildlife habitats, biological diversity, recreation, and forest products. However, research shows that climate change is currently stressing the Nation's ecosystems and their ability to provide those services. These effects are very likely to accelerate in the future, in some cases destabilizing these forests. Disrupted ecosystems could have a decreased ability to provide the services upon which Americans rely. Many of the most urgent forest and grassland management problems of the past 20 years, such as wildfires, changes in water quality and quantity, and expanding forest insect infestations, have been driven, in part, by changing climate. The effects and magnitude of climate change vary across the country, but we must act now to be able to address these issues as they arise.

The Forest Service will use the best available science to assess the influence of climate change on the Nations forests and grasslands. We will focus on how climate change affects the forests and grasslands as well as how land management can influence the reduction in global greenhouse gases. Climate change will be integrated into land management plans by describing desired conditions, objectives and standards. The Forest Service will also continue research and monitoring efforts to improve our understanding of climate change.

The budget continues support for key programs that enable the agency to achieve these goals. The Forest and Rangeland Research request includes \$27 million for research programs on climate change. The FY 2010 Budget includes \$25 million for revising Land Management Plans and \$26 million for conducting Land Management Plan assessments, which enable national forests to address climate change in forest planning. The FY 2010 Budget maintains a steady \$653 million for wildlife and fisheries management; vegetation and watershed management; and forest products. These programs endow the agency with the ability to adapt to climate change's effects on national forest system lands, ensuring resilient ecosystems. In FY 2010, the Forest Service will build on a FY 2009 investment of \$825,000 to promote sustainable operations in order to reduce the agency's own environmental footprint.

Water

Our society requires adequate supplies of clean freshwater as a source of drinking water and as an engine for both agriculture and industry. While freshwater is a renewable resource, it is also a limited resource that requires careful stewardship to ensure it will meet the needs of present and future generations. In the last few years, we have seen the threats of drought to drinking water, forests, and agriculture throughout the country, from California to Wisconsin to Georgia. With the importance of this vital resource, we must act to ensure we are prepared to address the increasing scarcity of clean water.

The Forest Service plays a significant role in management of our Nation's water, given that 58 percent of our water supply originates as precipitation on forest lands, both on state and private lands and on National Forest System lands. Our agency maintains partnerships that address nearly 560 million acres of forested watersheds on non-federal lands that provide drinking water to over 138 million people. Another 70 million people get their drinking water from national forests and grasslands.

To ensure that National Forest System lands can continue to be a source for clean water, the Forest Service will conserve, maintain, and restore watersheds to sustain the ecosystems they support and the services they provide; secure water of sufficient quantity and quality to sustain aquatic and terrestrial life; develop and advance knowledge and shared learning central to managing forest and grassland water resources and watershed conditions expected in the future; and facilitate watershed-based partnerships to foster conservation and citizen stewardship.

Currently we are finalizing an inventory of the issues affecting National Forest System water resources, identifying actions that we can take to meet this crisis head-on, and developing materials to share with the public and our partners.

The Forest Service supports key programs that position the agency to address water-related challenges. The FY 2010 Budget includes \$57 million for managing aquatic habitat and \$60 million for maintaining and improving watershed conditions. These programs provide the base for efforts integrated across many other programs that secure ample supplies of clean water.

Kids in the Woods

As our Nation and especially our Nation's children develop more sedentary or more urban habits, we risk being disconnected from our environment. Being active in nature establishes healthy habitats and creates personal connections to nature, fostering a conservation ethic. Our Nation's urban and rural forests offer the setting for those active outdoor experiences, elucidating the contribution that the Forest Service can make to the national movement to bring children to nature and nature to children.

The Forest Service budget maintains funding to engage children in outdoor activities that will establish a meaningful and lasting connection to nature. The Forest Service has been active in youth contact programs for decades and is active in communities throughout the United States. The FY 2010 budget continues a \$500,000 investment for the More Kids in the Woods cost-

share award program. In FY 2008, the program, in its second year, leveraged a 3:1 ratio of funds on 16 projects that engaged 20,000 youth with nature. Beyond the work done through the More Kids in the Woods cost-share program, the budget provides \$29 million for urban and community forestry and \$5 million for recreation research, programs that support this effort. The budget continues steady funding levels for recreation of \$280 million and wildlife interpretation and education of \$9 million, forming a base of work for this effort on national forests. In FY 2010, the Forest Service will emphasize delivery of conservation education programs to underserved communities in urban and rural settings.

Conclusion

The Forest Service presents its FY 2010 budget positioned to fulfill its mission of sustaining the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. The budget supports the priorities of responsible budgeting for wildfires; of proactively addressing infrastructure needs to protect Forest Service facilities, roads, and trails; of conserving new lands; and of responding to climate change. This suite of monetary and management emphases enable the Forest Service to adapt to future challenges while continuing to conduct ground-breaking research, provide vital assistance to landowners and resource managers, and sustainably steward national forests and grasslands. Thank you and I look forward to our dialogue today.